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Conceptualising Popular Culture

'Lavani' and 'Powada' in Maharashtra

The sphere of cultural studies, as it has developed in India, has viewed the 'popular' in terms of mass-mediated forms – cinema and art. Its relative silence on caste-based cultural forms or forms that contested caste is surprising, since several of these forms had contested the claims of national culture and national identity. While these caste-based cultural practices with their roots in the social and material conditions of the dalits and bahujans have long been marginalised by bourgeois forms of art and entertainment, the category of the popular lives on and continues to relate to everyday lives, struggles and labour of different classes, castes and gender. This paper looks at caste-based forms of cultural labour such as the lavani and the powada as grounds on which cultural and political struggles are worked out and argue that struggles over cultural meanings are inseparable from struggles of survival.

SHARMILA REGE

The present paper emerged as a part of two ongoing concerns; one of documenting the regional, caste-based forms of popular culture and the other of designing a politically engaged course in cultural studies for postgraduate students. Most of the available frames for doing cultural studies drew heavily upon the American tradition. The focus in such courses was invariably on popular culture, understood largely as mass mediated culture and on the negotiations involved in the new forms of cultural consumption. The popular, caste-based forms that were being documented, seemed to have no place in this kind of cultural studies. Labour concerns in the cultural were so completely absent that a culturalist turn appears as if inevitable and natural. Such a turn in the academia is more than dangerous, especially in the context of globalisation and Hindutva politics, wherein globalisation comes to be viewed in extra-economic terms of either cultural invasion or cultural hybridisation. The regional and caste-based forms of the popular are not only completely blanked out in such a culturalist frame but also all forms of transformative politics are reduced to 'cultures of resistance'. Yet a reading of the formation of cultural studies revealed that its boundaries and frames have always been contested and if viewed as a struggle to understand and intervene in the structures and processes of active domination and subordination, it has a potent potential for transformative pedagogies in regional universities. This is of course a long-term project; the present paper is only an attempt to work out through a region-based case, one theme, namely that of popular culture.

Making Culture Popular

In the 1970s, the issues of class and culture as they had emerged in the post-war period of Americanisation had come to be studied [Williams 1961; Thompson 1968; Hoggart 1969] but were yet to be collectively christened as cultural studies. The name was later derived from the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. As Stuart Hall (1991) has argued the Centre never represented a single school of thought but was a space for ways of thinking out cultural issues as they emerged in society. In this sense there was no abstract subject matter that defined the Centre but what distinguished it theoretically was its conceptual problematic of culture as being neither distinct from nor reducible to social processes. Most of the projects emerged from a critical political involvement with concrete issues of the 1970s; mainly the resistance of British working class men and youth, later broadening to include women and ethnic minorities. By the 1980s cultural studies had been exported to the US, Canada and Australia [Blundell et al 1993]. The consequent Americanisation of cultural studies was marked by a decreasing concern with issues of the political economy of production, dissemination and consumption and an unprecedented concern with the fragmentation of cultures and identities.

The last decade and a half also saw unprecedented academic interest in the study of popular culture. This interest is in part a result of the new insights into the social construction of the world of art and the equivalence of texts and theoretical positions that privileged the audience over the creator. The study of popular culture became central to the emergent discipline of cultural studies in the American Academy. As Cultural Studies became a viable discipline, the notion of the 'popular' became distanced from Williams' conception of the 'popular' in a capitalist society as "never existing outside the relations of domination and imperatives of commodification and yet in these relations the masses are never only passive" [Mulhern 1995]. In highlighting the important notions of participation and subversion, such a

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conception of the 'popular' had made an important break from the earlier tradition of 'Kulturkritik' which had sought to defend culture from the ills of modernity, industrialisation and commercialisation. By the 1980s subversion had been replaced by 'subversive pleasure' in the study of popular culture, so much so that studies seemed to suggest that the 'popular' as a site of contestation was as if outside the capitalist logic. Culture as a contested terrain came to mean a complete equation of the cultural to the political, so that if an earlier economic reductionism had seen culture only as a political instrument, a newly emergent cultural reductionism dissolved the possibility of politics. As Mulhern (1995) has commented such a position of cultural reductionism paradoxically arrives at the same position as 'Kulturkritik'. Both the positions arriving via different routes tend to underline a complete submission to consumer capitalism. The political outside of cultural practice and political society beyond the particularities of cultural differences came to be overlooked. Hence as the study of the 'popular' became a viable discipline it lost its significance as a left political enterprise [Mcchesney 1996]. The study of the 'popular' became what Mcguigan (1991) calls 'cultural populism'; the experiences of common people came to be viewed as analytically and politically more important than culture with a capital 'C'. But in arguing thus, the earlier distinction between 'mass' and 'popular' culture was eliminated and what followed was an uncritical endorsement of popular pleasure. It is important to note that such logic was well suited to the populist concept of 'consumer sovereignty' of the New Right. The postmodern turn in the study of the popular and in cultural studies had arrived as the critical tension between 'popular' and 'mass' culture which was lost in a celebration of popular cultural consumption and the spheres of production and consumption came to be conceived as if autonomous from each other. The term cultural studies became a cultural commodity, free to circulate in the global economy of discourse [Allor 1987].

It may be worthwhile to recall the ontology of the terms 'popular culture' and 'mass culture'. 'Popular culture' had been discovered in Germany around the same time as industrial capitalism was being forged and related to the ideas of nationhood. The term was used to designate the uneducated and undifferentiated sections of European society and ideological debates centred round the possibly corrupting influence of the popular forms of entertainment. The term 'mass culture' came up in the 1950s to describe the culture associated with the 'lonely crowd' and eventually as the importance of the mass media increased not only as a major form of entertainment but also as ' Ideological State Apparatus' [Blundell et al 1993], the term became synonymous with culture transmitted by the mass media. The study of the 'popular' came to be predominated by descriptions of the folkways thereby overlooking the tensions between the cultures of the popular and the elite; the exchanges, albeit unequal, that redefines the content of the categories even as the categories themselves are kept [Bourdieu 1984]. The institutional reproduction of the 'distinctions' between the elite and the popular has rarely been the concern of either those studying the folkways or those celebrating the 'popular' in the 1980s. Interestingly, at a time when 'consumer capitalism' is being forged and is renegotiating the notion of the 'nation', the popular has again been discovered, albeit in its new avatar. The term 'popular' is in the present context of cultural studies, so completely synonymous with the 'mass mediated' that even the cultures of resistance of the marginalised come to be most often conceived only in their mass mediated forms.

Of Colonial Discourse and Modernity: Cultural Studies in India

A boom in cultural studies in the American academy is matched by a boom in studies of third world histories and cultures, drawing upon the theoretical perspectives provided by poststructuralism and postmodernism. This saw a rise of the later subaltern and postcolonial projects. Most of these postorientalism studies soon became a distinctive amalgam of culturalist critiques [O'Hanlon and Washbrook 1992]. Culture, power and history came to be conceived as 'Derridean supplements' [Dirks and Ortner 1994]. Sarkar (1997) has succinctly argued how the adoption of the postmodernist perspectives has meant a 'decline of the subaltern' in the later Subaltern Studies. Domination comes to be conceptualised in cultural discursive terms, as Sarkar (1997) remarks "Enlightenment rationalism thus becomes the central polemical target and Marxism stands condemned as one more variety of Eurocentrism. Radical, left-wing social history, in other words, has been collapsed into cultural studies and critiques of colonial discourse..." (p 84). There is an exclusion of class and the materialist critique of capitalism from the agenda of such a scholarship and the implications are critical for the academy and politics. Postfoundationalist studies which put forth timeless or undifferentiated conceptions of the 'Indian' as against a homogenised 'western' do often give a student a false sense of radicalism, of taking an oppositional stance. The impact that these perspectives have on those of us pursuing feminist and dalit studies is particularly dangerous. The gains of the women's rights movements and the anti-caste movements which had appropriated aspects of the colonial administration as resources [Sarkar 1997] would be completely lost in the binaries of the western and the indigenous. Dirlik (1997) has argued that there is a parallel between the ascendancy in cultural criticism of the idea of postcoloniality and an emergent consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s. Postcolonialists repudiate structures and totality in the name of history but end up as Dirlik argues "a self-referential universalising historicism...(projecting) globally what are but local experiences" (p 339). Aizaz Ahmad (1997) underlines the persistence of three themes in the wide spectrum of postcolonial criticism: the notions of hybridity, ambivalence and contingency; an assumption of the collapse of the nation-state as a horizon of politics and a persistent underlining of the globalised electronic culture, seen sometimes as a form of global entrapment and other times as yielding the pleasures of global hybridity. A postcolonial cultural criticism wavers between 'cultural differences' and logic of identity politics and 'cultural hybridity' and logic of contingency replacing all historicity. Thus, the rise of the subaltern subject and the postcolonial critic has meant that varyingly the 'indigenous' and 'hybrid' become as if autonomous spaces that can be adopted and discarded at will. More significantly, these thoroughgoing critiques of Eurocentrism sideline the critique of capitalism, as if the two can be separated. It would serve well to recall Dirlik's (1997) comment that without capitalism Eurocentrism is like any other ethnocentrism.

In the 1980s feminist theorisation in the academies of the first world too, took a

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cultural turn. Many of the debates on the category 'woman' ended in a nominalist position or alternatively in the revaluing of femininities. There were even appeals to collapse feminist studies into cultural studies. Mcrobbie (1996) for instance argued "The failure to face up to the limits of reason, truth and knowledge is predicated on a fear to let go" (p 9) and she then advises us to do precisely that – to let go and to study "How social relations are conducted within the field of culture and how culture in turn symbolises the experience of change...(to listen to)...the sounds in the kitchen, the noises in the home and the styles and signs on the streets." Despite this depressingly apolitical din of noises and flurry of the subversive pleasures of consumption and constitution of oppositional identities, there were some important insights developed by feminists. Some feminist research in cultural studies sought to develop a historical understanding of cultural forms and experiences, labour, the home and the nation. Black and third world feminists explored the gendered dimensions of the cultural and political representations of the colonies and race. Some of this work has contested the celebration of difference by drawing sharply the historical connections between race, class, gender and imperialism. In India too, the period saw some path-breaking feminist theorisation [Vaid and Sangari 1988; Tharu and Lalitha 1991; Chakravarti 1998] which sharpened feminist renderings of the reconstitution and reformulation of patriarchies, thereby promoting a rich flood of literature on gender in colonial India. Yet, as Sarkar (1997) cautions us, the framework of colonial discourse threatens to marginalise the earlier work and feminist studies of modern India have come to be predetermined by Foucauldian and Saidian frames.

The arrival of cultural studies in India and the place of the popular therein need some deliberation. As Ghosh (1996) has underlined the arrival of cultural studies, largely outside the institutional folds, holds the potential of engaging in a critique of "naturalised ideologies, universalist theories and of theorising fragmentary resistance" [Ghosh 1996:12]. Cultural studies in a postcolonial context, drawing upon poststructuralist methodologies generated a critical examination of representations and their linkages with structures of power. However, such critiques have directed attention away from the economic and political structures and have focused on the culture of modernity [Joseph 1998]. Colonial discourse analysis is so central that it is possible to delineate the major trends in doing cultural studies in India in terms of their varying analyses of modernity. At least three such trends can be outlined; the rejection of modernity [Nandy 1983; Chatterjee 1994 for example), the interrogation of modernity [Niranjana et al 1993] and the consumption of modernity [Appadurai 1997; Breckenbridge 1996 for example]. 'The rejection of modernity' school underlines the alien and dangerous nature of western modernity and the popular is thus seen in terms of the precolonial, multiple, internal and authentic tradition and community. The pre-modern thus becomes the only possible means of resistance [Joseph 1998] and the popular assumed to be a homogeneous mass becomes always and already resisting. 'The interrogation of modernity' school theorises culture as an integral part of a network of social and political relations and thus makes a significant contribution to the theorisation of the popular. Modernity is historically located and interrogated for signs of power founded by new technologies and forms of communication, as they define the terms of identity [Vasudevan 1996]. This school states intent as that of going beyond "the dominant social science frame in India which saw caste and community as embarrassing obstacles for the new nation to overcome...and in which culture was viewed as national culture and national identity" (Brochure of CSCS 1998). Yet much of the work of the centre has viewed the popular in terms of the mass-mediated forms, no doubt contributing to the conceptualisations in the study of cinema and art. Nevertheless the relative silence on caste-based cultural forms or forms that contested caste is surprising, since several of these forms had contested the claims of national culture and national identity. 'The consumption of modernity' school, explicitly rejects the adjective 'popular', since it is seen as having undergone a complicated set of shifts, expansions and critiques. The term popular is replaced with the notion of 'public culture'. The notion of public is delineated from its history of civil society in Europe and is seen as constituted by cricket, tourism, food, cinema, the contestations between the state and the middle classes. Consumption is thus viewed as a modality of social life, thus separating the spheres of consumption and production. Those who cannot enter this world of consumption do not obviously figure much in this analysis.

The present paper seeks to conceptualise the popular as those forms and practices, which have roots in the social and material conditions of the dalits and bahujans. A documentation, both historical and contemporary of such regional and caste-based cultural practices suggests that there has been a marginalisation of these practices by bourgeois forms of art and entertainment [Srinivasan 1985; Banerjee 1989; Rege 1995]. Yet following Hall (1981) it may be argued, popular practices are neither just traditions of resistance nor just forms on which the bourgeois forms are superimposed. They are at once emancipatory and imprisoning, containing and resisting and relatively more or less affected and unaffected (in different spheres) by capital. The popular is appropriated by modernity and appropriates modernity, albeit unevenly, such that different forms come to be produced as popular for different sections of people at different points of time. The category of popular persists but the ways in which it relates to everyday lives, struggles and labour of different castes, classes and gender, alters the content of the category. This paper views the caste-based forms of cultural labour, such as the 'lavani' and the 'powada' as grounds on which cultural and political struggles are worked out and argues that struggles over cultural meanings are inseparable from struggles for survival. It seeks to map out the ways in which the lavani and powada produced by women and men of the lower castes come to be produced as the popular for the people. The 'moments of discovery and rediscovery' of the popular forms are especially focused upon in order to underline the dialectics of cultural struggle and the ways in which cultural distinctions are produced and reproduced differentially for different castes, classes and gender. The popular is not outside the relations of power and domination and hierarchies and tensions within the popular need to be highlighted. It is in this context that the present paper focuses on the tensions between the feminine lavani and the masculine powada.

The Lavani[1] of Eros and the *Powada* of Courage

Key commentators on the 'shahiri' or folk tradition of Maharashtra have argued that the powada is the man and the lavani the woman; the powada is the ballad of bravery, the lavani may be of the spiritual, devotional or erotic kind. The earliest traceable lavani dates back to the 17th

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century. While over 300 powadas of the early Maratha period (1640-1700) have been traced [BISM collection no 311 (5) and 286], the 'shringareek' or the erotic lavani, with explicit descriptions of the sexual have been traced to the 'GathaSapatshati'. The 'GathaSapatshati' is a collection of Prakrit verses composed by the masses about their everyday lived practices, including the sexual and dated between 1 AD and 7 AD [Morje 1974]. Some scholars have traced it to the Domb and Matangi songs performed by the women of these castes [Dhond 1988]. In the *Dnyaneshwari* (13th century AD), there are references to the performances of the Domb and Matangi songs at the court and in the marketplace. It may be argued that while in the *Gathasaptashati* of the *prakritjan* the early lavani appears as an expression of the everyday desire of the common people; in the *Dnyaneshwari* it is described as a performance having 'the explicit aim of provoking wealthy men into parting with their money'. It appears that by the 13th century, lavani performances had entered the realm of exchange. The powada is referred to in the *Dnyaneshwari* as a form of eulogy. The form is seen as emerging from the cultural practices of the bards and genealogists who belonged to the *Gondhali (bard), Gavli (cowherd), Mahar, Mang, Sali-Mali (weavers and gardeners) and Bhat (bard and genealogist)* communities. Most of these powadas celebrated the brave deeds of the maratha heroes in battle.

The first attempts of collections of the folk literature began around the mid-19th century. In 1868, several magazines like the *Vividhdyanvistar, Nibhandhamala* and *Kavyaithihas* Sangraha published such collections. Primacy, both in collection and publication came to be given to the powada. These magazines explicitly stated the need to recollect the past if a new future was to be framed. The powada became a major means of recollecting the golden past of the maratha warriors. One of the early collections 'Ballads of the Marathas' [Shaligram and Acworth 1890] suggests that the powada was a symbol for expression of group loyalties. However as O'Hanlon (1985) argues, by the late 19th century, the powada became one of the grounds on which conflicting social and cultural identities were worked out. It is only in the second decade of the 20th century, collections of lavani too were undertaken. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar justified the priority given to the powada in terms of the primacy of the political powada over the cultural *lavani* [Kelkar 1974].

One of the early collections of the lavanis is of the erotic lavanis; most of the very erotic lavanis in the collection are dated to the Peshwa period. It is interestingly titled 'Andharatil Lavanya' (lavanis for the dark); suggesting thereby their erotic character. There is in Marathi, a popular proverb, about the relationship between the lavani and the Peshwa rule. The proverb 'Lavani Va Bai chya nadane Peshwa Budalee' (the Peshwa rule collapsed due to the lavani and women) blames the lavani performers for bringing about the decline of the brahmanical rulers of western India. An analysis of the erotic lavani of this period suggests that it was produced as a popular form and became one of the modes of constructing the sexuality of women of the lower castes. The bodies of lower caste women were constructed in the lavani as either arousing or satiating male desire. This construction was crucial to the pre-colonial Peshwa state in the appropriation of the labour of lower caste women – through the institution of slavery.

The reign of Bajirao I (1796-1818) saw the pauperisation and increasing indebtedness of the peasantry. One of the worst famines was in the year 1803 and this it has been noted had lead to an increased sale of women of the lower castes. [Gavali 1981]. A prominent feature of the slavery of the period was the predominance of female slaves. The Peshwa state's involvement in the trade of female slaves was an important source of revenue.

Under conditions of famine, a major part of the revenue was raised through the trade in female slaves. Conventionally, there were two major means of procuring slaves; one by abducting women in wars and the other by enslaving lower caste women charged with adultery. Since Bajirao II did not wage even a single war, majority of the female slaves were lower caste women charged with adultery. Absconding slaves were arrested and forced into enslavement by the state. The Peshwa state levied a tax from the private buyers too. It may be noted that adultery by women of the upper castes was punished by excommunication from the caste [Oturkar 1950, Gavali 1981].

The Lavani of Eros and Sexual Economies

The women of the lower castes enslaved by the Peshwa state were employed in the courts, 'natakshalas' (dancing houses) and other departments of the Peshwa state. They were employed in homes, stables, granaries, cattle houses, dancing houses, stores, communication and construction works [Gavli 1981a]. The Peshwa state often gifted some of these women slaves to officials in lieu of their salary. Fukazawa (1991) notes that the caste of the slaves played an important role in the kind of services forced upon them. It emerges, therefore, that the sale of women of the lower castes was necessary for the later Peshwa state. The revenue was collected mainly through the taxes levied on the sale of these slaves and their labour was appropriated in the different 'karkhanas' of the Peshwa government. Chakravarti (1998) underlines as significant, the fact that the errant women of the lowest castes were made available to men of the higher castes through the intervention of the state.

The female slaves of the Peshwa state seem to fall into two categories; the 'kunbinis' (bought for domestic and agricultural labour) and the 'bateeks' bought for their sexual labour, either by individuals or for the dancing houses of the state. The kunbinis who performed domestic labour could not have been from the 'ati-shudra' castes, while the bateek came from both the shudra and ati-shudra castes. Road building and ammunition work both required labour and there are records of the Peshwa 'daftar' (now at an archive in Pune) which imply that kunbinis who had illicit relations outside of caste were to be banished to do such work

A preliminary reading of *Andharatlya Lavanya*, the collection of erotic lavanis composed during the later Peshwa period conveys an impression of an overtly expressed female sexuality. But further analyses reveals that these lavanis endorsed the dichotomy of the bateek (whore) versus the soubhagyavati (wife). The lavanis that overtly express the insatiable desires of women are composed in the voice of the lower caste whore, while those that express 'virah' (the pain of separation) are composed in the voice of the wife. The bateek is constructed as having intense bodily needs, seeking sexual pleasure from all men and as expressing the desire to watch the intercourse in a mirror. The wife is constructed as in awe of the virility of the husband and her sexual expression is underlined by the desire for motherhood. The only note of complaint by the wife is about a husband who is not a man enough to father her children [Andharatil Lavanya 1956; 18, 41, 141, 155, 165, 177, 178, 189, 249].

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As noted earlier, adultery by the lower caste women was the major grounds on which their sexual and productive labour was appropriated and the lavani of the period was one important mode of constructing them as adulterous. Thus, the lavani, which was produced as a popular form of entertainment of the bahujans, at the court of Bajirao II, was also as an ideological justification of the enslavement of women of the lower castes. The public performance of the lavani was a part of the 'tamasha' or the folk theatre. A typical performance began with 'gan' (devotional offering to Ganesha), a gavlan (a comical act performed by 'effeminate' male artiste through exaggerated feminine gestures) followed by the performance of lavani and mujra, The vag (or spontaneous theatre) of the satirical – is a later addition.

Powada of Valour and Politics of Identity

The powada as the male form of expression has been labelled as "not emotional but of bravery; not soft but straightforward as against the feminine lavani which is beauty, eros and emotionality put together" [Kelkar 1974:23]. The Peshwa period saw the composition of over 150 powadas in the praise of the Peshwa state. The earlier powadas about the valour and bravery of the Marathas were lost from public memory [Varde 1930]. Most of the popular powadas of the Peshwa period were composed in praise of the 'brahminical rule' of the peshwas. There are instances of additions and deletions being made in the compositions of the shahir Anantphandi; in which he holds Bajirao-II responsible for the downfall and for the dire poverty of the people. The powada as a vehicle of group identity was discovered in the second half of the 19th century and sought to revive the earlier glorious history and culture of the marathas in overtly political, and contradictory ways. O'Hanlon (1985) has juxtaposed three accounts of the period; all centring on Shivaji. Phule's powada 'A Ballad of the Raja Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhosale', Rajaramshastri Bhagwat's 'The Community of Maharashtra' and Eknath Annaji Joshi's 'The Advice given to Maharaja Shivaji by Dadaji Kondadev' were all published during the period 1860 to 1890.

Caste antagonisms certainly existed prior to the British conquest but there were no concerted efforts to build a united challenge to the brahminical dominance. Much of the historiographical traditions that arose in the late 19th century sought to establish the historical superiority of the nation; understood as both the maratha country and India. As Omvedt (1976) has argued, much of the historiographical traditions of the period arose in response to and in the context of the non-brahmin challenge, the roots of which are located in the life and works of Jotiba Phule. Brahmins and non-brahmins turned to the figure of Shivaji in seeking an interpretation of the past [Omvedt 1976, O'Hanlon 1985, Vartak 1999]. Phule's powada presents Shivaji as the leader of the lower castes and attributes his achievements to the strength and skill of his shudra and ati-shudra armies rather than his ministers. The powada became the vehicle for the claims of groups of lower castes in the 19th century to stand as the rightful leaders of Maharashtra society and as representative of its tradition.

Phule's powada is composed in eight sections and as Phule, himself declares in the preface, the powada has the explicit aim of reaching out to the mang, mahar, mali and kunbi, i e, to say all the shudra and ati-shudra castes [Phule 1869]. Phule reinterprets Duff's (1800) history of the marathas; especially in his reading of the role played by Dadaji Kondadev and saint Ramdas in the life of Shivaji. Referring to Dadaji, he remarks "The fish swims in water; does the fish have a guru?" thereby minimising the role of Dadaji just as he clarifies that it is for the love of the people that he established, a temple of Bhavani Mata at Raigad and accepted Ramdas as his guru. In Jotirao's powada, Shivaji emerges as the 'kulwadi bhushan', the pride of the shudras. In the other powada composed by him, he critiques the brahmin-ridden policy of education. He critiques the educated brahmin teacher who has no qualms in shaking hands with the British but who condemns the Mahar students as polluting [Phadke 1991]. Rajaramshastri Bhagwat, a Sanskrit scholar and reformist, questioned the division of society based on birth. Bhagwat argued that Shivaji represented the second rise in pre-eminence of the marathas. He emphasised the role of brahmins as religious advisers and the absence of caste divisions and overall concern for good of the community [O'Hanlon 1985]. Bhagwat sought to establish the notion of a united Maharashtra with its own identity – drawn upon local traditions as against a homogenised Hindu tradition. For Phule, the marathas were strictly the community of non-brahmin castes and he did not see any integration between the brahmanic religion and the popular culture. It is important to note that Bhagwat's account was published in the *Vividhadnyan Vistaar*, which had rejected Phule's ballad. Eknath Annaji Joshi's powada too was accepted by the Dakshina prize committee fund, which had rejected Phule's work. The work of Joshi is an example of the way in which a popular form comes to be sanskritised, the meter of the powada is replaced with that of the Sanskrit 'shloka' .The entire powada is a piece in the voice of Dadaji Kondadev, the brahmin teacher of Shivaji, calling upon Shivaji to rescue India from the Muslims. The powada is in fact entitled 'The Advice given to Maharaja Shivaji by Dadaji Kondadev' (1877). Shivaji is assimilated directly to the tradition of classical Hindu mythology and is made to sit in the line of great 'kshatriya' heroes. The daitya or demon kings, invoked by Phule as the original and just rulers come to be compared with the Muslims and Shivaji is then called upon to take the role of 'narsimha'. Brahminical conservatism is assimilated in the new forms of political activity, namely, nationalist struggle and in doing so, the popular cultural form of the powada comes to be appropriated. It is important to note the way in which the upper caste distinction of Joshi's powada over Phule's powada is underlined through the use of the panditi or the sanskritised style of composition. The powada thus comes to be produced differently as representative of the popular shudra tradition in the case of Phule's powada and as representative of a pan-Indian, brahminical Hindu tradition in the case of Joshi's powada. It is apparent that the powada had emerged as a ground on which political identities and struggles came to be worked out. The powada of the earlier period as we have noted, was composed mainly by the gondhalis of the lower castes and the theme centred on bravery and valour. The second half of the 19th century saw not only the collection of powada but also a rise in the publication of powada in the literary and political journals. The brahminical appropriation of the powada, invokes the popular to underline the cleavage between the pan-Hindu tradition and the Muslim or the British. The powada as the popular invoked as a form of expression of the masses and becomes a vehicle of underlining the caste contradictions as they were being distorted, enlarged and polarised. The lavani as the expression of eros and

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devotion remained outside the purview of these political processes and with the emergence of the bourgeois theatre many of the lavani performers faced a threat of marginalisation and extinction.

Desexualised Theatre and the Sexualised Lavani: Emergence of the 'Sangeet barees'.

After the Peshwa rule ended with Bajirao's surrender at Vasai – the tamasha performers were forced to seek new patronage and many troupes moved to the princely state of Baroda. The major economic changes of the period saw the entrenching of market forces in agriculture and the expansion of the bureaucracy of the colonial state. These processes had lead to the emergence of a class of middlemen and the middle classes both of whom produced directly and indirectly, the lavani as popular for certain classes while declaring it as immoral for others. The processes that produced the 'popular' were intertwined with the self-definition of these classes.

Vishnudas Bhave presented the first theatre performance of a Marathi play at the court of the raja of Sangli. This heralded the emergence of a new theatre of the middle class and the upper castes, which came to be placed in opposition to the folk theatre or the tamasha. The *Bombay Times* claimed "Bhave's plays are of native origin – from the early classic dramas of Hindoostan. They are void of everything approaching licentiousness and indecorum and are images of the moralities in which the Christian church in older times used to rejoice" (*Bombay Times*, March 8, 1853). The two decades following the 1860s saw several English and Sanskrit plays being translated into Marathi as the patronage of the Marathi theatre by the newly educated middle class marked an increase. It may be noted that male performers called the 'stree party' performed all female roles in the plays and this in a sense rendered this theatre as moral. The dichotomy between 'nachee/nartaki' (dancing girls/dancer), 'tamasagir/kalkaar' (folk-performer/artist) intensified as the lower castes were being displaced from their hereditary sphere of the performing arts by the emergence of the bourgeois theatre. The growing popularity of the theatre and its mark of morality lead to a series of changes in the structure of the tamasha. The performance of the 'vag' (spontaneous theatre of the satirical kind), which had, no doubt, been a part of the tamasha performance, but only second to the performance of the lavani, now emerged as central to it The emergence of the bourgeois theatre and its exclusion of the female performers had come to mark as immoral and licentious the performance of the lavani. The theatre of the male performers came to be marked as cerebral as against the sensuous lavani. It may be argued that this may have been one of the major reasons for which the tamasha of the period turned to the vag or the spontaneous theatre over the lavani. The history of Marathi theatre for this period [Adharkar 1991] records attempts by women of the lower castes (probably displaced tamasha performers) to start theatre companies in which women enacted both male and female roles. These attempts by popular artistes to stake their claim to the newly emergent Marathi theatre were severely criticised and ridiculed. It is possible therefore that the 'sangeet barees', a reformulated version of the tamasha emerged as an offshoot of these companies. Women of the Kolhati caste formed most of these sangeet baree troupes – the kolhati caste is referred to as 'ugadya mandichi jaat', literally meaning, the caste of those whose women move around with their thighs bare. The women were known to be the breadwinners of the family and dancing and prostitution have been recorded as their caste-based profession. There is also a mention of their knowledge and practices of cures for sexually transmitted diseases and impotency. There were now at least two kinds of tamashas; the 'dholki-phad' tamasha in which the vag or the spontaneous theatre was central and the sangeet barees which centred on the performance of the erotic lavani. The sangeet baree performance evolved its own form – including a lavani each of the 'ada' (expression), 'baleghati' (emotion) and 'chakkad' (erotic) mode. The performance was marked by 'daulat jadda' or bidding by some persons from the all-male audiences for the 'nachee' or the dancer to perform a lavani of their choice.

Men manage the dholki-phad tamasha – while the sangeet barees are planned, financed and organised mainly by the kolhati women. These women do not marry (are not permitted to by the caste panchayat) while the women of the dholki-phad tamasha are most often married to troupe members and are relatively subjected more to familial patriarchal regulatory controls. They look down upon the sangeet barees as 'immoral' and not representative of the 'true tamasha tradition'.

By the early 1890s, tamasha theatres had been established in Mumbai and Pune and a contract system emerged, as theatre owners became middlemen employing the troupe members on salaries or against an advance payment. The theatres also organised 'baithaks' – or private sittings; the audiences of which were regulated by the contractors.

Only the wealthy could have access to these private baithaks, which were associated with the authentic unadulterated lavani. The nachees or the dancers claim that these private baithaks have been the major mode of 'saving the tradition' from the near complete influence of the Hindi cinema.

It is thus important to note that in a period in which the powada became a bearer of contested political identities, the emergent bourgeois theatre had considerably marginalised the lavani of eros by stigmatising it as immoral and vulgar. This lead to considerable reformulations in the content and form of the tamasha or the folk theatre. The tamasha centering around the vag or spontaneous theatre was considered to be more moral and a political expression as against the sangeet barees which were considered to be immoral and a expression of 'aatishbaaji' or sheer entertainment of a sensuous kind. It is apparent that there is a continuous and uneven struggle to disorganise and reorganise the lavani. There are tensions between the emergent bourgeois theatre and the tamasha that comes to be pushed to the periphery. In the process the content of both the elite and the popular is reformulated, the emergent elite theatre marks its distinction from the folk via a process of de-sexualisation, so that only men perform on the stage. The popular tamasha is recast into the overtly political and theatrical dholki-phad tamasha and the overtly sexualised sangeet-barees. It is during this period that the vag went up the cultural escalator and in fact the initial three decades of the 20th century are marked as the golden period of the vag. The performance of the lavani comes to be equated to immorality and 'ranjan' (sensuous entertainment) and the structure of the performance is recast as more and more sangeet barees come to be employed on a contractual basis by the theatre owners and the audiences intervene in the performance by bidding for the performer. This recasting becomes the distinctive 'immoral' feature of the sangeet barees as even other popular forms mark their distinction from them. Exclusion of women from stage

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performances ceases to be a high cultural value yet the marking of the lavani performers as vulgar and veiled prostitutes continues. The cultural distinctions which reveal themselves in the struggles over the forms of culture between the bourgeois Marathi theatre between the vag and the sangeet barees become ways in which existing and new forms of power and control rooted in caste, class and gender hierarchies come to be legitimised. Capital has a stake in the culture of the popular classes since it holds the potential of resistance [Hall 1981] and it may be argued that in a caste-based society where in sexual regulation and control are crucial to the maintenance of caste and class boundaries, the stakes are further intensified. The rise of the bourgeois theatre and the emergence of a contract system in the tamasha saw an active destruction of the ways of life in which the performances were rooted.

From the late 19th century, a distinctly working class district had begun to emerge in Bombay. The tamasha had become the working class man's theatre [Chandavarkar 1998]. Narratives of the senior tamasha artistes reveal that there were more than 19 tamasha theatres in the working class quarters of the Bombay city. The early years of the regional talkies (1930s) were marked by the mythologicals and the social and thus targeted to the middle class audiences .In the context of the restrictions on imports during the war period, preferential access to the raw stock was given to the Hindi cinema which was emerging as the national cultural form. In the post-war period, the revival of the regional cinema sought to produces the lavani as the popular regional culture .The films 'Jai Malhar' and 'Ram Joshi' – were highly successful at the box office and the Marathi cinema revived by creating the tamasha genre of films as the regional popular. The same period however saw a ban on the tamasha groups by the Bombay state in the 1940s. The lyrics it was argued were lewd and that prostitution was being practised in the name of art [Jintikar 1948]. As the Eastman-colour Hindi films wooed the urban audiences, the tamasha genre sought to claim regional popularity. The adaptation of the tamasha genre by the Marathi cinema marks out clearly the drain of sexuality of the female lavani dancers of the kolhati and other lower castes. The Marathi cinema, dominated by brahmins and marathas, drew its raw material from the lavani tamasha of the kolhatis, mahar and mangs, converted it into saleable goods, and took it back to the audiences in the small towns at double the price. The film actresses in the tamasha genre most often came from outside the kolhati caste, and only a few tamasha artists (Usha Chavan, Leela Gandhi, Sarla Yevalekar and Madhu Kambikar) could make a space for themselves in the Marathi cinema. The lavani from the Marathi films constructed the lavani dancer as a 'pakhru' (bird) 'bijlee' (lightning), and 'jawanichi baag' (garden of youth) [Khebudkar 1980], the focus being on a native, wild and rustic sexuality which was to be tamed and reformed by the hero (invariably either the patil's son or school master, i e, always upper caste. After the 1960s, the sugar lobby in Maharashtra had consolidated its economic and political gains [Attwood 1993, Lele 1990]. As the Marathi cinema acquired finances from the newly emergent capitalist forces in agriculture, the lavani began to use the metaphors of wells, pump sets, engines, sugarcane, mangoes, coconuts, and papayas to describe the bodily features of the lavani dancers (HMV series of film lavanis). These lavanis in the double entendre objectified and fragmented the bodies of the nachees the well referred to the vagina, mangoes to the breasts, ripe sugarcane to virginity, etc. This exaggerated sexualisation of the lavani dancers and their construction as wild, too hot to handle or uncontrolled become ways of consolidating caste and gender hierarchies. The dichotomy of passive and pure wives as against wild and impure lavani dancers is underlined and the inability of lower caste men to control the sexuality of their women is reiterated thereby continuing to legitimise the hegemony of the dominant castes. The patriarchal caste ideology that orders the sexual division of labour also regulates the division of sexual labour. The popular cultural forms of the 'kasbi' (performing) castes were so produced that the women were framed as 'kabnurkarin' (pigeon) and were framed in the sphere of the erotic (in the male gaze) and were denied familial spaces. On the other hand, the upper caste women – whose reproductive and domestic labour is appropriated within the space of the familial, were constructed as 'gharaandaaz' (pure and moral) and passive and thus denied the space of the erotic.

The overt sexualisation of the lavani dancers in the Marathi films had serious consequences for the lavani performers in the sangeet barees and tamasha. The tamasha theatres faced the threat of closure, with the increasing encroachment by the cinema both regional and national. The contractors demanded that the nachees dance to the film lavani and add erotic and provocative dance steps, as in the films. The raw material that went from the kolhati women to the films, came back to them ironically in a form that they could hardly recognise as their own. Some troupes were recast as musical orchestras, in which the lavani was absent. The lavani dancers now attired in trousers and caps danced to film numbers. In the 1960s after the formation of the state of Maharashtra, there was an expansion of the Marathi cinema and several tamasha troupes were forced to become part-time troupes [L Joshi 1977:164]. Many of the nachees of the dholki-phad tamasha revealed that they had to perform seasonal agricultural labour and domestic services in towns in order to make ends meet.

The Political Appreciation of the Tamasha: The 'Jalsa'

The Satyashodhak Samaj was established in 1873 and the Samaj took up issues of untouchability, oppression of women and the peasantry, blind faith and the oppression by the village brahmin. These issues came to be debated in the newspapers like the *Dinbandhu, Vijayi Maratha, Kaivari* and *Deccan Rayat*. The message of these debates was conveyed to the masses through a new genre of tamasha – the jalsa. It has been noted that people from the neighbouring 10 to 20 villages gathered to participate in the jalsa. It is important to note that this audience included women as against the traditional tamasha [Shinde 1973]. The content was altered such that the traditional gan (offering to Ganesha) was replaced with a verse in praise of the creator; the gavlan (the traditional dialogue between Krishna and the milkmaids) was transformed into an encounter of the non-brahmin hero with the daughter of the brahmin priest of the village. This became the mode of critiquing brahminical practices. The key element of this jalsa was the vag (the spontaneous theatre) which was instructive – in praise of modern science and education and was built around the mockery of oppressive religious practices. Omvedt (1976) notes that the jalsa played a prominent role in forming and spreading a popular Maharashtra culture of religious and caste revolt. In Satara district, where the Satyashodhak jalsa were concentrated,

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they were intrinsically linked with the tenant rebellions in 1920s. The organisers of the jalsa, Vichari and Anandswami were also the major organisers of the tenant rebellion.

The jalsa often took up issues of enforced widowhood, tonsure, prostitution and education. One of the famous compositions from the jalsa, which critiqued the brahmanical practice of tonsure, was

> Dear father, I am your dear and loved one,
> How can you force me to shave off my hair?....
> Why don't you change your mind and arrange a 'pat' (second) marriage for me instead?

This composition especially assumes importance in the light of the fact that there was a rebellion of the barber community under Phule's leadership and they had refused to shave the head of widows [Chakravarti 1998]. Another interesting popular composition in the jalsa was entitled 'The notice given by Rukmini and the reply given by Vithoba' and was about the brahminisation of the 'bhakti' cults in Maharashtra. The composition entitled 'The world leans' critiqued the rich men who bid for the sexual services of the tamasha dancers. The accounts of the jalsa do not mention women performers and in fact it seems that jalsa, highlighted their difference (reform character) from the tamashas via the exclusion of women performers. It is important to note that in the jalsas there was a focus on the dialogue between the group of brahmin women (enacted by men) and the non-brahmin hero of the village (these dialogues were a sharp mode of criticism of brahmanism) but such a division of roles between hero (non-brahmin) and a group of women (brahmanical), made invisible both the cross-caste brahmanical patriarchies and the revolutionary potential of non-brahmin women (an imaginary inversion of the practice; the interrogator played by non-brahmin woman critiquing a group of brahmin men reveals the point that is being made). The jalsa received the patronage of Shahu Chatrapati and several meetings of all the jalsa were held in Kolhapur. The 'Kesari' of the Tilakites ridiculed the jalsa as low culture of the tamasha and would refer to the composers as tamasgirs and not as jalsa shikshaks (teachers) as they were called in the Satyashodhak tradition [Shinde 1996]. The non-brahmin challenge by Jedhe and Javalkar in Pune in the 1930s sought to resist the hegemony of the Ganapati festival through yet another recasting of the tamasha, the 'Chatrapati Mela'.[2]

A new genre of Ambedkari Jalsas is noted in the 'Shahiri' tradition of Maharashtra in the period 1920 to 1956. With their message of opposing caste-based oppression of brahmanism, these jalsa also addressed issues of dowry, indebtedness, prostitution in the name of religion and the need for education, organised effort and struggle [Kirwale 1992]. The ranjan (entertainment) motif of the tamasha was dropped, thereby excluding female performers and a central role was accorded to the 'songadya', the comedian. The series of political progressive appropriations of the genre could not result in any reformulation of the nachee's role and to that extent, the patriarchal ideology of the dominant castes and classes was again reiterated. Babasaheb Ambedkar's refusal to accept any financial grant from Pathe Bapurao – a famous vag performer of the period (a brahmin) on the grounds that the money was earned at the cost of lower caste women's dignity is understandable – yet the complete absence of women is the new jalsas, poses a problem. The popular cultural forms had been politically appreciated and recast but the role of the lavani dancers is not reformulated but excluded. Thus the Victorian theatre emerges as the epitome of civilised culture as against the licentious and immoral folk forms of the natives; the Marathi bourgeois theatre emerges in the emulation of Victorian while labelling the tamasha as obscene and constitutes the 'vag' as superior to the sangeet barees of the Kolhati women. The Satyashodhak and Ambedkari jalsas are distinctively political against 'ranjan' (entertainment) content – via the exclusion of women. Such a chain reveals – therefore the dangers of seeing sangeet barees as a form of women's culture and therefore resistance to patriarchy. The communist and the socialist movement in Maharashtra also politically appreciated the tamasha genre in their 'kalapathak' and in fact in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, this genre became central to the expression of the Marathi identity.

The Powada and Contesting Claims of Identity

The Samyukta Maharashtra movement, the movement for the formation of Maharashtra state based on a common linguistic identity marked shahiri, the folk form as a strong cultural base for the political movement. This movement saw a combined front of Communists, dalits and socialists – and a distinct tradition of powada emerged within each of these ideological positions. Though the powada is produced as the bearer of an authentic Marathi identity, the powadas reveal the contesting claims to a regional identity of Samyukta Maharashtra and the tensions within a homogenised Marathi identity. Shahir Amar Shaikh, Shahir Annabhau Sathe and Shahir Gavankar represent the trends in Communist tradition, Lokshahir Vaman Kardak represents the Ambedkari dalit trend while Shahir Vasant Bapat represents the socialist trend.

Lokshahir Kardak gives primacy to annihilation of castes and is critical of an alliance with the Communists, though several of his compositions demand a redistribution of resources [Salve 1997]. Consider for example the following two compositions;

> Oh the women in red with her lover in Moscow.
> Beware or else you may be fooled!

And;

> Tell us oh Tatas and Birlas,
> Where is our share of foodgrains and wealth
> [Jadhav 1997]

Annabhau Sathe from with the Communist Party claims,

> With the red flag,
> comes a new generation of workers,
> they move on ahead,
> to change the lives of the oppressed
> they shall emerge victorious in this battle
> (Annabhau Sathe Samagra Vagnmay, ASSV1999).

Annabhau's performance began with a salute to Tilak and Phule and Ambedkar – the Hindutva claims of Tilak sit awkwardly with the tradition of Phule and Ambedkar [Salve 1997]. His powada include those in praise of both Lenin and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Annabhau Sathe locates the struggle for Samyukta Maharashtra as a struggle of the working class against the non-Marathi capital. In his famous composition entitled 'My Maina Got Left Behind in the Village'; *Maina* the beloved became a metaphor for the separation of Maharashtra from Mumbai. Says Annabhau,

> My maina is left behind in the village
> my heart yearns for her,
> shapely,dusky and virtuous,
> she has a broad mind,
> infact, she is the Sita of my Ram
> (ASSV, 1999)

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Annabhau interprets Shivaji, as a democratic and just ruler of the masses. He writes;

> He distributed all the land amongst the tillers.
> All the parasites were finished.

Annabhau Sathe died in dire poverty and his monumental contribution remained marginalised [Korde 1999].

The socialists recast the powada in the 'kalapathaks' (performing arts troupe) of the Rashtra Seva Dal. Vasant Bapat performed the "powada of the courageous men" in the Kalapathaks. It is important to note the lavani in praise of the sensuous beauty was performed through shadow play. In the Maharashtra Darshan, a theatrical presentation of the culture of Maharashtra by the Rashtra Seva Dal in tracing the great shahiri tradition of Maharashtra – Bhau Fakkad the noted dalit composer is deleted.

Vasant Bapat's powada 'The Sun of Freedom has Risen' claims "Hindu Muslim, Sikhs Parses, do not fight amongst yourselves...Lets love each other lets be brothers" [Bapat 1988]. In another composition, Shivaji comes to be invoked as a Hindu King

> Allah's name on their lips
> but the devil in their thoughts
> why spare them –
> just hack them – Oh soldier
> For they are the progeny of Afzulya,
> Hack them, in the name of Shivaji Raja
> Come – Take this vow – now!
> [Salve 1997]

Thus in marking the powada as a unifier of Marathi identity, the internal tensions in the contesting ideologies of the different trends in the genre are glossed over. Powada is invoked as the symbol of the cultural integration of Maharashtra and special powadas came to be composed for the All India Radio. Shahir Vasant Bapat – recast the powada and the lavani for the middle class and the upper caste audiences. This could be called an aestheticisation of the popular forms; a trend which both the Hindutva forces and the audio market consolidated upon. Both Sathe and Kardak remained marginalised within the mainstream literary tradition while the theatrical performances of the powada of Shivaji – by ShivShahir Babasaheb Purandare, with blessings from Hindutva forces ran to packed theatres of the middle class audiences. These compositions reached the middle class homes and public ceremonies via the emergent cassette industry. The powada of Shivaji is firmly established in the middle class mind through the compositions of the middle class, upper caste composers; symbolisng him as the icon of Marathi male bravery and later as the saviour of the Hindu religion. The coincidence with the 'sons of the soil' and 'savior of Hindus' phase of the Shiv Sena is not accidental. The powada of the 'vir rasa' (bravery) comes to be synonymous with popular pride, self-respect and aggression of a Marathi and later a Hindu identity. It is marked as distinct from the effeminacy of the congress and elitism of the socialists, communists, dalits and muslims are rendered anti-Hindu and anti-national [Thakeray 1990]. The vir rasa plays a major role in challenging young men to recuperate their masculinities and this needs further exploration.

The powada, the masculine form emerged as an unadulterated, authentic and political expression of a Marathi and Hindu identity. The lavani, the feminine form remains associated with ranjan and is produced as the commercial –popular by its appropriation by the tamasha genre of Marathi cinema. Cultural distinctions between the political powada and commercial lavani between Annabhau's shahiri in the slums, Kardak's shahiri on the outskirts of the village and Bapat's shahiri for the middle classes legitimise forms of power and control that are rooted in caste, class and gender inequalities. Bapat's presentation of these popular forms in an aestheticised form – really set the base for its appropriation by the electronic media. We need to note the different levels at which the notion of the popular is being deployed.

Globalisation has had a dramatic effect on the tension between particularism/universalism that is at the core of the notion of culture. In the discourse of globalisation media emerges as the legitimate bearer of commercialised symbolic forms – such that any cultural integration is seen as possible only through the media, i e, it is disembedded from its territorial base and re-embedded in a communication media frame. The Hindutva forces have sought to contest this discourse of globalisation at a populist level which seeks the cultural integration of 'authentic Hindu community' as one opposed to all that is mass – mediated and so western. So that the globalisation becomes a cultural invasion, separated from the economic. Advertisements of shoes were burnt on the grounds of obscenity, and bar maids and sex workers regulated in Bombay city, all in the name of 'our culture'. Note that all the issues, from obscenity in the media to trafficking were rendered as cultural. The Michael Jackson show, the Miss World show and the Enron project are posed as fund-generating and therefore economic. The powada as authentic local, discrete from the global is invoked to generate a sense of community in times of free market economy.

The concept of culture is used to underline the characteristics that distinguish one group from another as also to refer to some set of phenomena, which are different from (and higher) than some other set within any group [Wallerstein 1991]. The popular cultural form becomes at one level an assertion of unchanging realities amidst a world that is ceaselessly changing. At another level, the distinctions within the popular become justification of the inequalities to keep these inequalities unchanging. Thus the powada as characteristic of Marathi/Hindu culture as against others – becomes an assertion of unchanging reality even within the context of free market. The differentiation within the powada and between the lavani and the powada, which mark one over the others as more political, authentic and moral, becomes a justification of the inequalities – too keep them unchanged. The conceptualisation of popular culture for a project of radical cultural studies cannot be limited to social histories of texts and audiences. It requires that histories of the caste- and region-based popular forms, capital and politics; the struggles over meanings and resources be traced and analysed. Such struggles in the form of rural dalit and adivasi sahitya sammelans (literary meets) have been active since 1987. In the last two years, 'sakal' (integrated) and 'vidrohi' (rebellious) sahitya sammelans and cultural movements have sought to negotiate the differences between the left, dalit, feminist and adivasi cultural activists and to initiate the cultural front. EPW

Notes

[Sections from this paper have appeared in Rege (1995) and Rege (2000). An earlier version of this paper was presented at a workshop organised by Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, at Vagamon in September 1998. Suggestions and comments by Ram Bapat, K N Panikar, Gopal Guru, Vidyut Bhagwat and Sandeep Pendse have helped in the reworking of the paper. This work is a part of a long-term project on 'Dalits and Public Culture In Maharashtra' which began in 1995 with a documentation of the tamasha and at present

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seeks to document the dalit popular writings, gatherings, meetings, *jalsas* and gayan parties in the region.]

1 Analysis of the lavani is largely based on the fieldwork done at Narayangaon and Pune and on Rege (1995).

2 A detailed analyses of the same has been done in Contesting Claims to the Public: The Ganesha Festival and Chatrapati Melas , a paper read at a workshop on 'Popular Culture' organised by the Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Pune, March 1999.This has been published in Sociological Bulletin,49(2), September 2000.

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